

Text: Exodus 7:14 - 12:36; 1 Cor. 10:1-13

Title: "Do not deny the ten plagues"

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Introduction: In 1993 historian Deborah Lipstadt authored a book titled, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, in which she investigates what was then the growing Holocaust denial movement. Lipstadt named the writer David Irving as one of the key proponents of that movement, and as a result Irving sued Lipstadt for libel. The resulting case actually put the historicity of the Holocaust itself on trial in England.

In English law the burden of proof of innocence lies with the defense, making the challenge for Lipstadt and her legal team a difficult one. In the end, they succeed in proving that Irving not only lied about the Holocaust, but also did so deliberately to deceive his readers in service of an anti-Semitic agenda. The case opinions said in part, "Irving has for his own ideological reasons persistently and deliberately misrepresented and manipulated historical evidence."

Today, misrepresentations and manipulations of history, especially biblical history, persist for similarly ideological reasons. This ideology is simple: if these plagues were real, I must do a certain thing with my life; and if these plagues were merely myth and legend, I can do other things with my life. If these plagues are real, God is someone I must fear; if these plagues are merely myth and legend, I can make my god someone I am more comfortable with.

I have titled the message this morning, "Do not deny the ten plagues," and I want to offer four important truths about the plagues that we all must believe as we begin our

study of them. The ten plagues occupy Exod. 7:14 – 12:36, and we will take a closer look at those passages in the weeks ahead. But this morning I want to introduce the plagues with an overview and note four things that are true about them taken as a whole.

I. The ten plagues are facts of history (1 Cor. 10:11).

Illustration: Rabbi David Wolpe was once hailed by *Newsweek* magazine as the most influential rabbi in America. After a 2001 Passover sermon in which Wolpe denied the reality of the Exodus and its ten plagues, he granted an interview to Michael Medved to discuss his point of view.

In the interview Wolpe told Medved the following about the exodus: “The exodus certainly didn’t happen the way the Bible depicted, assuming that it was a historical event in any description. I think that if you look at it scientifically, it is virtually indefensible to make the Bible’s case. But you also have to understand that your faith isn’t based on splitting seas or archaeological digs.” Wolpe said also that the legendary nature of the account should not undermine a person’s faith in its lessons. He told Medved, “Whether it was true, it is true, and those are two different things. In other words, things that are not facts can be truths.”

Application: I wonder how Wolpe would react to someone saying the same thing about the historicity of the Holocaust. Can the Holocaust be a truth without ever having been historical fact? Absolutely not. If the Holocaust was not a historical fact, it is one of the biggest lies ever hoisted on society, not a truth. The same is true for the exodus.

Note that the Apostle Paul entertains no doubts about the historicity of the exodus events, the miraculous aspects

included. He refers to the parting of the sea (v. 1), the cloud that led them by day (v. 2), the manna that fell from heaven (v. 3), and the water that came from the rock on command (v. 4). Not even any of the rabbis who trained the younger Paul, who was then known as Saul, would have denied any of the miraculous plagues that God performed in Egypt.

In verse 11 Paul says, "Now all these things happened." So if they did not really happen, Paul was deluded, and the apostolic faith he preached was an unfortunate misunderstanding. Wolpe's rejection of Christianity is not helped by His denial of the exodus, because it clearly undermines all of Judaism as well. The Psalmist speaks of the plagues with great specificity as historical events (Ps. 105:27-37).

In addition, ancient history testifies to the historicity of this work of God. I referred last week to "The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage" from Egypt's Middle Kingdom, which went into great detail about the time of the plagues, including the remarkable description of the way slaves were made rich with the wealth of their impoverished masters. In addition, Egyptologist David Rohl refers to mass graves from that period that "were quickly followed by an abandonment of the Asiatic quarter of the city. . . The Semites simply gathered up their belongings and left. Archeology cannot tell us where they went . . . but the Bible does" (*Exodus - Myth or History?*, 155-156).

An Egyptian historian named Manetho from the 3rd century BC writes of the Pharaoh of this time the following passage: "In his reign, for what cause I know not, God smote us (the Egyptians). And, unexpectedly, from the regions of the east, invaders of obscure race marched in confidence of victory against our land. By main force they easily seized it without striking a blow" (Rohl, 156). Rohl concludes that

the Hyksos invasion succeeded “without striking a blow” because the kingdom of this Pharaoh had experienced the ten plagues. Do not deny the ten plagues. They are history.

II. The ten plagues are scriptural (1 Cor. 10:11; 2 Pet. 1:16-21).

Illustration: I read in my devotions recently the amazing account of the Transfiguration of Christ in Matthew’s Gospel (chapter 17). Peter, James, and John see Christ glorified and the reappearance of Elijah and Moses. Then they hear the very voice of God from heaven, “This is My beloved Son.” Can you imagine what it would be like to have an experience like that?

Application: Peter recounts that experience in 2 Peter 2, but then he says something striking about our relationship to this supernatural event. He says in verse 19 that we have a more-sure word of prophecy than even an experience like that. In addition, he says that we have that more-sure word of prophecy in Scripture. What makes Scripture more-sure than even experiencing the Transfiguration? The answer is that when Scripture was written, “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (v. 21). No wonder Peter says in verse 19, “ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (v. 19). When I sit on my couch and read Scripture’s account of the Transfiguration, I get more light of truth from it than Peter, James, and John received from actually experiencing it.

Paul tells us this is true of the Exodus Scriptures as well. He says “they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world have come.” He mentions how the written account shows us what displeases our God: our desire for evil things, our idolatry, our fornication, our tempting Christ, our murmuring (1 Cor. 10:6-10).

Throughout Scripture God's unstoppable deliverance of His people through the ten plagues is a picture of His mighty work of redemption from the bondage of sin. It was the Passover lamb that ultimately saved Israel from the tenth plague, and this lamb points to the sacrifice of God's Lamb, Jesus Christ, that saves us from the plague of our sins.

The Psalmist puts this theology this way (105:42-45): "For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant. And he brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness: And gave them the lands of the heathen: and they inherited the labour of the people; That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws. Praise ye the Lord." The ten plagues are Scriptural, and Scripture tells us how sinners can be redeemed from sin through Christ.

III. The ten plagues are merciful (1 Cor. 10:13).

Illustration: Some of the best basketball players in the NBA did not grow up playing basketball. They grew up in foreign countries playing soccer rather than basketball. But because of their natural athleticism and overpowering size, they make great basketball players even though basketball is a foreign and strange game to them.

Application: The Bible indicates that God's work of judgment is similarly foreign and strange to Him. Because of His natural holiness, wisdom, and power, He is a perfectly just and thorough Judge. The answer to Abraham's question, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25), is certainly an emphatic, "Yes He shall."

But judgment is God's response to the sin of fallen creatures. Fallen angels and fallen men were not a part of his original creative design. Judgment is the only work God

executes that He must do, in part because of the nature of another. In that sense, judgment is His foreign and strange work. Isa. 28:21 uses these words to describe God's work of judgment: "For the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act."

Like Abraham, the prophet Habakkuk knew to pray for God's mercy in times of judgment: "O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy" (3:2). As we read through the ten plagues, we are going to be surprised at the way God remembers mercy in this time of judgment. I will just mention a few things quickly here this morning:

1. The Lord merely requests that His people be given the opportunity to worship Him, not a full-blown exodus.
2. There are ten plagues that take some time, not a singular and sudden devastating blow.
3. The message to Pharaoh comes early in the morning with the plague often coming "tomorrow."
4. The plagues begin less harmful and grow to becoming more so. No human life is in danger until the 7th plague.
5. Once human life is in danger with the hail of the 7th plague, God provides Pharaoh and the people of Egypt with an extended warning.
6. The Lord hardens Pharaoh's heart during the 7th plague, but not before. Pharaoh hardened his own heart both prior and after this. Even when God hardens the heart, Pharaoh is in hearty agreement with God's hardening.
7. Before the devastating 7th plague, God extends a personal plea to Pharaoh (Exod. 9:16), provides him and his people opportunity to find shelter for themselves and their ani-

mals (vv. 19-21), spares the wheat and rye harvests (vv. 31-32), and waits for “tomorrow” to send the hail (v. 18).

8. The Lord provided the Passover – an opportunity for salvation from the tenth plague that kills the firstborn. He provides the greatest mercy in time for the severest plague.

The ten plagues are merciful, but the terrible thing about God’s mercy is that we sinners always like to presume upon it. The more merciful God is, the less we obey Him. The longer he waits in longsuffering, the deeper our commitment to disobedience becomes. The more lenient his grace, the more severe our prideful rejection of His will. There are only two possible antidotes to this vicious cycle – our repentance or God’s judgment. Pharaoh experiences the latter, not the former. How will we respond to God’s mercy?

IV. The ten plagues are spiritual (1 Cor. 10:12).

Application: The ten plagues are designed especially to deal with the heart of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Three words are used for the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart in these chapters of Exodus. From them we learn how to recognize when our heart is harder than it should be before the Lord.

1. The hard heart is a strong heart (קִּיָּץ), not a weak one. In his commentary on Exodus, Paul warns, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). The hard heart is the heart that thinks he is strong enough to stand and not to fall. God gives grace to the humble.

2. The hard heart is a heavy (כִּבְדָּה), immovable, unresponsive heart, not a pliable and responsive one. Resistance to spiritual change doomed the spirit of Pharaoh to the consequences of his sin. It can do the same to us. Have we come this morning looking to change? Have we come teachable, pliable, and responsive?

3. The hard heart is a difficult (קָשִׁי) heart, not an easy one. Fixing the hard heart is, in fact, impossible for all but One. The human heart is a hard case indeed.

Conclusion: Jesus was once asked, “Who then can be saved?” His reply was, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” What is God doing in your life and my life to change our hard heart? God told Pharaoh, “And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, to show thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.” That would happen one of two ways – Pharaoh’s repentance or God’s judgment.

God allows us to live for the very same reason – to show us His power and that His name may be declared throughout the whole earth. How shall it be done in our case? Through our repentance and trust in Christ’s sacrifice for our forgiveness of sin, or through God’s judgment?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*